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INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE OF PUPILS.

ITS PRESENT STATUS IN FRANCE.

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The progress of the international school correspondence in France has been slow, but continuous. About twelve years ago Professor Mieille started the movement by asking some English friends to correspond with his pupils. Mieille, being a teacher of English, felt that the reading and translating of English stories and classics into French, and still more the writing of compositions, was a very tiresome labor for his pupils. The results he obtained by correspondence were good, better even than he expected. He tried to have it introduced into other schools; he sought the support of the newspapers. Many of the latter adopted his suggestions and helped to exchange addresses among the pupils. Among the newspapers, with a large circulation, we may mention the *Concordia* in Paris, whose proprietor, Mr. Lombard, showed a deep interest in the progress of this new movement. Leading educators considered it of great value. Professor Gaston Mouchet, of Paris, was the first who, writing in a Boston magazine, *Education*, appealed for the support of America. Professor Schacht, of Switzerland, became the champion in his native country. Mr. Évrat, from the Lycée of Angoulême, during the session of the International Congress of Secondary Education held at the Sorbonne, made an earnest plea for the introduction of "school correspondence" into the curriculum. The *Revue universitaire* said: "The idea of Professor Mieille is a happy one; it is a practical one; it is highly approved in France by the higher administration." Everywhere the idea found a fertile soil and grew rapidly.

In the year 1900-1901 there were 1,078 French children who were corresponding with German pupils, and 125 adults. In 1901-1902 the number remained stationary, there being about 1,010 pupils. During the time from 1897 to 1901 the teachers of 217 schools had introduced this system to their pupils. These schools were divided as follows: 104 *collèges de garçons*, 71 *lycées de garçons*, 6 *écoles normales*, 3 *écoles de commerce*, 1 *école*

primaire supérieure, and 1 *école libre*, making a total of 186 boys' schools, against which there are only 31 girls' schools; that is, 16 *lycées de jeunes filles*, 7 *collèges de jeunes filles*, 5 *collèges normaux*, and 3 *collèges primaires supérieures*.

It was, indeed, very difficult to secure the support of any of the principals of the girls' schools in France for the international school correspondence. Most of the girls are educated in the Catholic convents, and I think we all know how difficult it is to introduce innovations into such schools. There are about 150,000 young girls in the convents, and only about 16,000 in the *lycées*, and the first named could not be considered at all until last year. Since the "Combes law," enacted in 1902, these convent schools are placed under state supervision, and no doubt we may look forward to a largely increased number of girl correspondents for the coming years. As is well known, the girls in France study very little German, except in the large cities and the eastern towns, and on that account the German central station found great difficulty in getting enough French girl correspondents. But it is a satisfaction to know that Professor Hartmann said in the spring of 1903: "The friends of the international school correspondence are informed that there is at present a large demand for this work from the foreign countries, especially from the *lycées* and *collèges* in France."

When an idea, conceived by one man, approved by others of the highest scholarship and the deepest interest in education, and supported by the leading papers, is debated, submitted to a vote, and unanimously accepted by leading educational institutions, we must consider such action as an indication of real value. During the meeting of the International Congress for the Instruction in Modern Languages, held July 25, 1902, the chairman put the following motion to a vote:

Resolved, That this meeting, being in possession of the results attained by the international school correspondence in France, England, Germany, America, and Italy, and having heard the favorable opinions of a great number of teachers who have tried it, hereby accepts the report of Mr. Mieille, and expresses the opinion that the correspondence between French and foreign schools be introduced into the classes of modern languages as a means of instruction, and that the teachers in those classes be encouraged to practice

it, in order that the writing of letters be given a place in the final examinations.

There was not a dissenting vote in the whole meeting.

During the session for secondary education on August 3, 1900, the following resolution was passed:

In Erwägung, dass der durch Privatinitiative ins Leben gerufene internationale Schülerbriefwechsel ein wichtiges Hilfsmittel nicht nur für das Erlernen fremder Sprachen, sondern auch für die allgemeine Geistesbildung und für die Beziehung der Völker untereinander darstellt, empfiehlt der Internationale Schulcongress allen Behörden angelegenstlichst, diese Angelegenheit in jeder Weise zu fördern.

Even the order issued by the minister of instruction on May 31, 1902 (applying also to the convent schools, which are now under the supervision of the government), recommends that the international school correspondence be introduced into the courses of modern languages. We see in this the approval of the government, which considers it a valuable pedagogical means.

I feel inclined to think that Professor Schacht, of Switzerland, has given us the best testimonial in favor of the school correspondence. He says:

(1) The repeated reading of a letter in a foreign language must aid the pupil in his study and must increase his interest. (2) The reading and interpretation of a letter in a foreign language furnish the best opportunity for acquiring the *useful* knowledge of the language, and for becoming acquainted with the idioms of the language. (3) The use of those letters gives to the pupil the consciousness of his knowledge, and brings him into familiar contact with the most interesting topics of life. (4) The pupil tries to read the foreign script, which is always quite different from the letters taught in his own country. (5) This correspondence brings the people in closer touch and contributes to the growth of friendly feeling among nations. (6) It gives a deeper knowledge of the institutions and manners of a foreign people. (7) It brings to the pupil the opportunity of visiting a friend in a foreign country; it creates often practical and lasting relations.

Professor Mieille expressed himself regarding the international relations as follows:

Wir sind überzeugt, dass kein Mittel der Mitwirkung erfolgreicher ist, als das von mir vorgeschlagene: die Vereinigung der europäischen Jugend in der Brüderlichkeit durch Briefwechsel.

As the best proof that Mr. Mieille has spoken correctly, I take the liberty of reading the following letter. It is written by a French boy, eighteen years of age, to this German correspondent:

Ich fürchte, es besteht bei Euch ein gehässiges Vorurteil gegen die Franzosen. Bei uns, wiewohl der Schmerz jünger ist, besteht dieses Gefühl gegen die Deutschen sozusagen nicht. Viele erkennen, dass sie die Deutschen gern haben, und ich gehöre zu diesen. Und glauben Sie nicht auch, dass zwei Völker Nebenbuhler sein, ja selbst sich bekriegen können, und doch vermögen ihre gegenseitigen Charaktere zu lieben, sich einander zu schätzen? Das sind delikate Fragen. Seien Sie wenigstens überzeugt, dass ich ohne Hintergedanken zu Ihnen rede, wie zu einem wahren Freunde, dem ich mein innerstes Herz zu öffnen nicht scheue.

Is it not a pleasure to read such a letter? It is the result of a correspondence which started with the everyday phraseology of persons who are not acquainted, but who gradually became friends and now express their innermost thoughts. I am sure that in this direction it would be of great value for the American as well as the European pupil. How often we hear in our own classes the most absurd statements about European people and countries! And, pardon me, how much we had to change our conception of the American people and institutions since we set foot on this soil! The knowledge which we received in Europe concerning the American people was, to say the least, very limited.

I have here another letter, written by the son of a mayor living in a small town in a province:

Ich wurde sehr zufrieden, als ich Ihren freundlichen Brief ergehalten. Sie fragen mir Ihnen zu sagen, wie lange werde ich in dem Lyceum bleiben? Drei Jahre noch und dann will ich Militärarzt machen. Wie langweilig ist das Leben im Lyceum und wie angenehm ist das Leben im Familie. Ich bin traurig und weiss nicht warum? Mein Herz is liebevoll und ich habe Niemand zu lieben!

Take now such sentences as: "Ich wurde sehr zufrieden, als ich Ihren Brief ergehalten;" or, "Sie fragen mir Ihnen zu sagen;" or, "dann will ich Militärarzt machen." Write these on the blackboard, explain the mistakes, and their correction will make more impression upon the pupil than if he had made the same mistakes himself.

Another letter gives a description of Alençon and its famous castle; still another tells of the treasures in the Louvre and in the Luxembourg; some others, of the beauties of the Riviera. Does not all this interest a young mind? Will the pupil not ask questions, read books, collect more knowledge about such topics, just because they are brought before him in a personal manner?

I was in doubt whether a correspondence between young people who have never personally met each other could last any length of time, or whether the enormous distance separating us from Europe would lessen the interest in it. Before me lie the letters of a young lady from Valence, France, to an American girl. They commenced to exchange letters in 1899, and today they still keep up their correspondence. It is quite remarkable how many different topics have been discussed in these letters, and how much the style of them has improved. They sent to each other postal cards with views of the towns they were living in, of the places they were visiting during their vacations, amateur photographs, and, as they became friends, their own photographs.

May I add some personal experiences? Three of my own pupils traveled last year in Europe, especially in France and Switzerland. I urged them to write to some of their acquaintances in those countries. They did so; and when they receive a letter or send one, we all discuss it in the class with the greatest interest. I shall send Professor Hartmann the names of some of my pupils, and hope to get still better results.

To my mind the international school correspondence has been a valuable means for the study of modern languages in all the countries where it has been introduced, and when we think of the rapid growth it has made lately in France, we may feel assured that in the near future it will become a still greater factor in the study of modern languages in that country.